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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
27 March 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
FURTHER DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION
CONTAINED HEREIN IS NOT AUTHORIZED

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HIGHLIGHTS

The Soviet Communist Party plenum yesterday endorsed the stand against US actions in Vietnam taken at the early March consultative meeting of Communist parties. This rather routine reaffirmation of Moscow's readiness to help Hanoi did not contain any reference to the specifics of promised aid or to the possibility of sending Soviet volunteers. Rumors of Chinese Communist obstruction of Soviet military aid shipments through China have come out into the open; press reports in Moscow attribute to "well-informed Communist sources" complaints about Peiping's "delaying tactics."

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
No major military engagements were reported today, but Viet Cong terrorists sabotaged a US LST in Da Nang harbor (Para. 1). A Vietnamese Navy party today landed on an island off Nha Trang which appears to be part of the Viet Cong maritime infiltration complex (Para. 7).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
The Quat government, in an effort to give the impression of growing political stability, has lifted martial law throughout the country (Para. 1). Buddhist leader Tri Quang, has privately deplored the government's feeble exploitation of the bombings in North Vietnam (Para. 3).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
US Navy aircraft conducted an armed reconnaissance against DRV patrol craft in North Vietnamese coastal waters on 27 March (Paras. 1 and 2). [REDACTED]

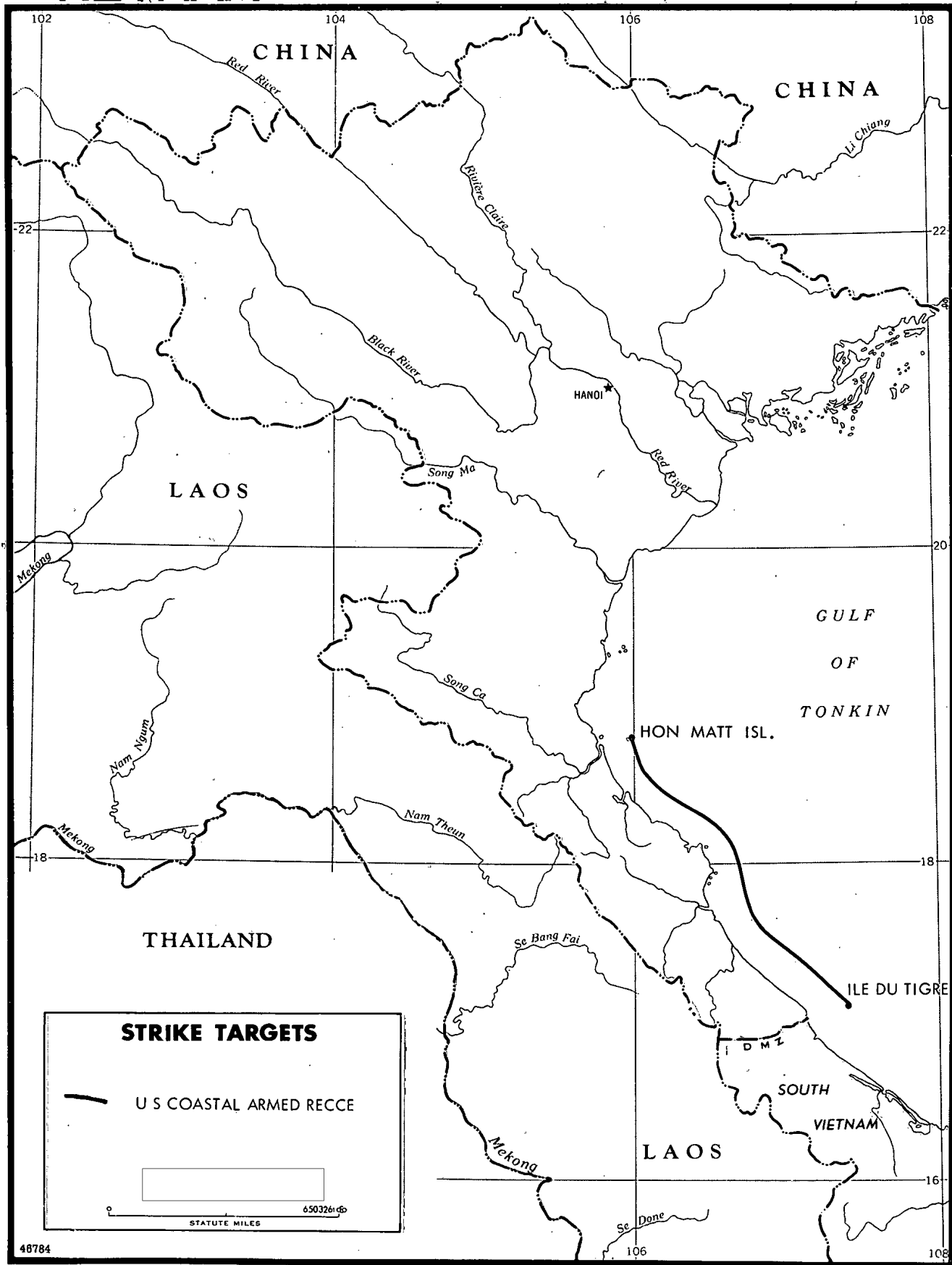
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IV. Other Communist Military Developments: No bloc military developments directly related to Vietnam have been detected. [REDACTED]

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V. Communist Political Developments: The Soviet Communist Party Central Committee plenum yesterday endorsed the "declaration" by the 1-5 March consultative meeting of Communist parties condemning US actions in Vietnam (Paras. 1 and 2). Communist countries continue to hammer away on the "gas warfare" issue (Para. 3). Hanoi and Peiping are attempting to create an impression of widespread support for the Viet Cong by citing offers of volunteers from other bloc countries (Para. 4). Largely Soviet-inspired rumors of Chinese Communist interference with the delivery of Soviet military aid to North Vietnam continue to spread (Paras. 5 and 6). Peiping and Hanoi have exaggerated US aircraft losses in claiming a great victory over US strike forces on 26 March (Para. 8).

NORTH VIETNAM



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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. No major military engagements have been reported today, but Viet Cong terrorists sabotaged a US LST craft in Da Nang harbor. The explosion occurred shortly after midnight Saigon time, inflicting considerable damage to the fantail area and to two interior decks. The vessel did not sink since most of the damage was above the water line. The damaged vessel was manned by a contract Japanese crew and was engaged in carrying nonmilitary supplies from Saigon to Da Nang. Most of the cargo had been off-loaded at the time of the explosion. A port police patrol had reportedly made a circuit of the area just before the explosion.

2. MACV's military report for 25 March showed 59 Viet Cong initiated incidents, of which 13 occurred during the reporting period. Small-scale harassment, terrorism, and sabotage accounted for most of the actions listed.

3. Two civilians were assassinated in Thua Thien Province. In Binh Dinh Province, a district town, a village, and two New Life Hamlets were harassed. The Viet Cong entered a railroad station in Binh Tuy Province, taking the telegraph, keys, and documents, and fired on a radio station in Pleiku Province. In the delta, the Communists harassed posts in Kien Phong, Vinh Binh, Vinh Long, and Chuong Thien provinces respectively.

4. Government operations of battalion size or larger declined on 25 March from 19 to 16, with 10 initiated and 13 terminated. Government air activity decreased over-all, but interdiction missions increased. USAF activity increased slightly, mainly because of additional interdiction missions.

5. A government operation, begun in Binh Dinh Province on 9 March and targeted against local Viet Cong forces, terminated on 24 March with the following results: Friendly losses, 3 KIA (1 US), 11 WIA (1 US); Viet Cong losses, 112 KIA (100 by air strikes), 3 captured and 5 individual weapons.

6. The press reports that government forces have uncovered 350 25-pound mines in three Viet Cong arms dumps in Tay Ninh Province.

7. A Vietnamese Navy party today landed on an island off Nha Trang which appears to be part of the Viet Cong maritime infiltration complex. Three Viet Cong were captured, and there was evidence of camp sites, dugouts, and occupied caves. MACV considers it highly likely that the island is a drop-off point and that the captured personnel comprised a "welcoming committee" for Viet Cong junks engaged in providing logistic support for Viet Cong elements on the mainland.

II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Quat government has lifted martial law throughout the country in an obvious attempt to convey the impression that it is firmly in control and the political situation is becoming stabilized. Premier Quat had earlier indicated that one of his intentions in easing security controls was to weaken the position of General Dong, who for some months had been functioning as military governor of Saigon. Dong has tended to take a hard line toward the Buddhists and is suspected by Quat of being too sympathetic toward Catholic-oriented elements which might again attempt a coup.

2. No further rumors of a possible coup during Ambassador Taylor's absence have been reported.

3. Buddhist leader Tri Quang is reported recently to have deplored the Quat government's failure to exploit the bombings of North Vietnam. Quang implied that a major psychological warfare campaign should be launched using themes emphasizing to the people of the North Hanoi's inability to protect them and conveying the impression in the South that the Viet Cong cannot now win. He also stated that the people in South Vietnam should be told that the Russians are closing their eyes, the Chinese are afraid, and the North Vietnamese cannot protect their own forces in the South.

III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Eight US Navy aircraft were launched at about 1100 local Vietnam time on 27 March to conduct an armed reconnaissance mission against DRV patrol craft along the North Vietnamese coast between Tiger and Hon Matt Islands.

2. All aircraft involved in the mission have been safely recovered. Results of this mission are not yet available. Weather conditions did not permit the conduct of other air operations planned against the DRV on 27 March.

3. Poststrike photography of the Vinh Son radar site struck by US naval aircraft on 26 March indicates that one small building at the west end of the site was heavily damaged. The radar equipment at the site was also apparently damaged. At the Ha Tinh radar site, eight buildings were completely destroyed and five others heavily damaged. A small fire apparently begun by weapons fired by flak suppression aircraft, was noted in the town of Ha Tinh. The radar equipment at Cape Mui Ron and Bach Long Island apparently was not damaged in the strikes.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. We have not detected any bloc military movements which appear to be directly related to the situation in Vietnam during the past twenty-four hours.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Soviet Communist Party Central Committee plenum yesterday adopted a resolution endorsing the 1-5 March consultative meeting of Communist parties and that meeting's "declaration" condemning US actions in Vietnam. The plenum also "fully approved the measures taken" by Moscow to render the DRV "further assistance to strengthen its defensive capacity." There is no hint in this standard Soviet pledge of the specifics of Soviet assistance to North Vietnam.

2. There is no mention in the plenum resolution of sending Soviet "volunteers" to Vietnam, nor is the possibility of a negotiated settlement broached.

3. Hanoi continues to hammer away at the charge that the US is using "gas warfare" in South Vietnam. On 27 March, Hanoi radio broadcast a Liberation Front statement protesting the use of gas. The statement, headlined in all Hanoi daily newspapers, reaffirms the confidence of the front in ultimate victory, "whatever weapons, tactics or maneuvers" the US may use. Moscow and Peiping are also continuing their propaganda campaigns denouncing an alleged US use of "poisonous gas" in Vietnam.

4. Both Hanoi and Peiping continue to highlight the responses from various countries to the front appeal for volunteers in an effort to create the impression of widespread support for the Viet Cong. Hanoi radio on 26 March recounted instances in the USSR, Communist China, and Hungary of youths contacting the North Vietnamese embassies in these countries offering to serve in Vietnam.

5. Rumors. [redacted]

[redacted] to the effect that Communist China is interfering with the delivery of Soviet military aid shipments to North Vietnam continue to spread. A Hungarian national of unknown reliability recently told the US Legation in Budapest that a Hungarian party plenum held two weeks ago devoted considerable attention to charges that China had been

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[redacted]

diverting a large share of Soviet arms being shipped by rail to the DRV. [redacted] expected a "dispute" over this to break into the open in the near future.

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6. Press reports from Moscow have already quoted "well-informed Communist sources" alleging that the USSR was having difficulty shipping military aid, "including missiles," through China to North Vietnam. The sources reportedly said that the Soviet party was considering informing other Communist parties of China's "delaying tactics" in moving Soviet supplies.

7. Peiping highlighted a press conference on 27 March in which a Liberation Front representative defended the "right" of the front to accept "all kinds of assistance" from outside sources. The front representative stressed the unity of the Vietnamese people, in both North and South Vietnam, in the battle against the US and their determination to fight even 10 or 20 years if necessary.

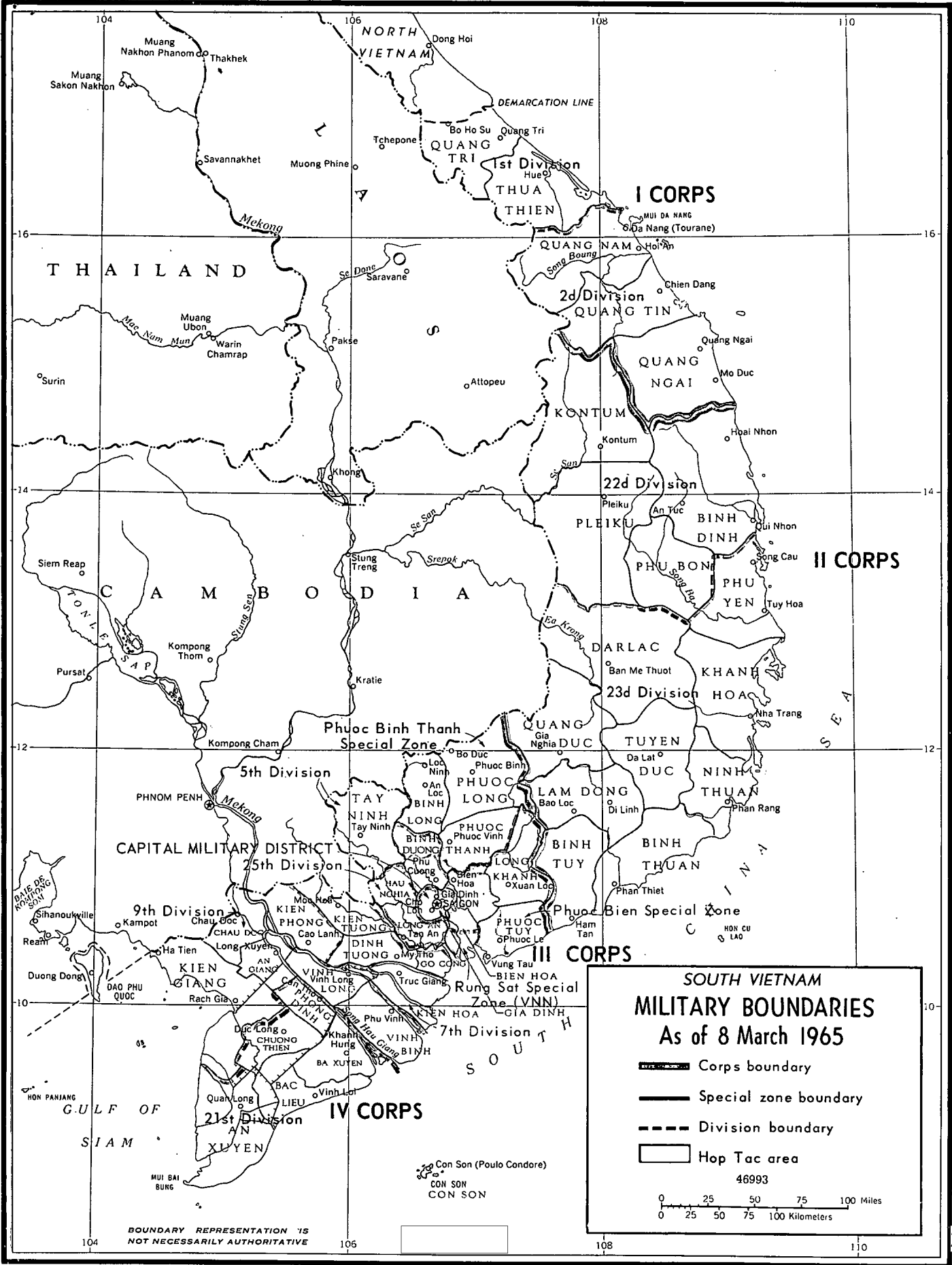
8. In commenting on the recent US strikes, both Peiping and Hanoi are exaggerating US aircraft losses, claiming 12 to 13 planes were shot down in the 26 March strikes.

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[redacted] Actually only two aircraft were lost and only one of these was shot down. Both pilots were recovered.

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